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Canonical and Irish Gothic Features in *Melmoth the Wanderer*

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Abstract

In the eighteenth century, a Gothic literary canon emerged. This B.A. Thesis aims to show that there is not a unique type of Gothic literary tradition. To illustrate this, a variant of the canonical Gothic, namely the Irish Gothic, is presented, with an Irish novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Robert Maturin, as an illustration of its main traits. Following an analytic method, the distinctive features of each Gothic tradition are explained separately. Then, an analysis of the major Gothic aspects found in *Melmoth* undeniably reveals that the most relevant ones belong to the Irish Gothic tradition. The novel, I conclude, can be safely included in the Irish Gothic category.

Keywords: Gothic, Irish Gothic, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Charles Robert Maturin, 'Catholophobia', Horror.

En el siglo XVIII surge un canon de literatura gótica. Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado, pretende mostrar que no hay un único tipo de literatura gótica. Para demostrar esto, se presenta una variante del gótico canónico, el gótico irlandés, y se ilustran sus rasgos principales a través de la novela del escritor irlandés Charles Robert Maturin titulada *Melmoth el Errabundo* (1820). Siguiendo un método analítico, se explican por separado los rasgos distintivos de cada tradición gótica. Después de analizar los principales aspectos góticos encontrados en *Melmoth*, confirmamos que no se puede negar que los más importantes corresponden al gótico irlandés, lo que nos permite clasificar esta novela dentro de la categoría del gótico irlandés.

Palabras clave: Gótico, Gótico Irlandés, *Melmoth el Errabundo*, Charles Robert Maturin, Anticaticismo, Horror.

*A storm without doors is, after all, better than a storm within;
without we have something to struggle with;
within we have only to suffer.*

Melmoth the Wanderer

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Introduction

The main goal of this study is to demonstrate that there is not just one type of Gothic fiction. What I have chosen to call the ‘canonical’ Gothic co-exists with other variants that arose from it. This paper works with one of those emerged variants, namely the Irish Gothic fiction. A number of Gothic works can be said to belong to minor subgenres like this. Likewise, I affirm that the different traditions that originated from the canonical Gothic fiction possess their own distinguishing traits, especially the Irish Gothic. I have chosen the Irish novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Robert Maturin to illustrate how its belonging to the Irish Gothic tradition does not prevent it from boasting many of the aspects integrated in the canonical Gothic.

Canonical Gothic literature has been the object of study of some important literary critics such as David Punter or Fred Botting. The former author collects in his work *A New Companion to the Gothic* (2012) the history of Gothic literature and presents some of the most celebrated authors of the canonical Gothic fiction and their major works. Some of these noted writers are Mary Shelley and her illustrious *Frankenstein* (1818) or Matthew Gregory Lewis and his transgressive novel *The Monk* (1796). Similarly, Fred Botting, in his famous work *Gothic* (1996), offers a thorough inquiry into Gothic literature, from its beginning in the eighteenth century to its most current representations. Botting focuses on Gothic fiction’s major themes, but also on the writers who set up the canon of this literary practice. Unfortunately, Irish Gothic fiction has not been studied as deeply as the canonical Gothic. Nonetheless, some literary experts have devoted some sections of their empirical works on Irish literature to the Irish Gothic, as occurs in *The Irish Novel* (1988) by James M. Cahalan. I have only been able to find one work dealing exclusively with Irish Gothic fiction, which is *Irish Gothics* (2014), written by two authors, namely Cristina Morin and Niall Gillespie. In *Irish Gothics* these authors define the areas which Irish Gothic literature encompasses.

This B.A. Thesis aims to set up a difference between the so-called canonical Gothic fiction and another subclass within this literary practice, namely the Irish Gothic. Indeed, the goal of this is to demonstrate that the subclasses emerging from the canonical type developed their particular features, which make them dissimilar—but

not contrary— to the initial canonical Gothic. In addition, this study intends to show that, when dealing with a Gothic novel, it is necessary to identify the type of Gothic fiction that work belongs to. This is important because its traits will vary depending on whether it is a canonical or an Irish Gothic work. Finally, this paper has also the goal of vindicating the figure of a disregarded author, Charles Maturin, and his Gothic masterpiece, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820).

The final drafting of this B.A. Thesis reveals the analytical methodology that has been applied to the preliminary work. First, I have read the novel at issue, marking those passages that caught my attention and taking notes of relevant data, such as the names of the characters or the different places cited in the book. After that, I decided that it was necessary to research thoroughly the context of the canonical Gothic —its history and origins— and its major characteristics. That information was retrieved from several bibliographical sources and from the knowledge I had already acquired from my literary studies. Then, I followed the same method to deal with Irish Gothic literature and its peculiar traits. In order to classify the main themes found in *Melmoth the Wanderer* into the category of canonical or Irish Gothic fiction, I reread the passages of the novel previously marked. Finally, I enumerated those aspects that I found interesting to mention, and classified them into canonical or Irish according to the parameters I had recognized in the preceding stages.

The three main sections into which this Thesis is organized reflect the research stages I have just outlined. The opening part, called “Approaching the Gothic Tradition”, deals with the canonical Gothic, explaining firstly its social context, then its origins and finally the foremost features that characterize this Gothic category. The chapter labeled “Irish Gothic: Origins and Overview”, where the boundaries of this type of Gothic fiction are set, comes next. In addition, this part includes the distinguishing features of the Irish Gothic. Last but not least, this B.A. Thesis closes with “Canonical and Irish Gothic Features in *Melmoth the Wanderer*.” In this section, an approach to Charles Maturin’s life is included and two blocks are distinguished, which are “Canonical Gothic Traits in *Melmoth the Wanderer*” and “Irish Gothic Traits in *Melmoth the Wanderer*.” Here, the main themes found in the novel at issue are classified according to whether they belong to the canonical or to the Irish Gothic tradition.

Approaching the Gothic Tradition

The eighteenth century was the highest point of the historical and philosophical movement known as the Enlightenment, more precisely in Britain and France. This phenomenon was a response against irrationality and superstition, and a way of dispelling the medieval dark times through the light of reason —hence its name. The Enlightenment introduced a new way of thinking which spread along Europe, provoking a shift in the mindset of European society in the eighteenth century. Hereinafter, reason will rule all aspects of human life, as reasoning was thought to improve life quality. It is also quite relevant to mention that this historical phenomenon was much concerned about scientific progress, arising thus new theories and intellectuals, among whom the figures of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Hume stand out. Social and scientific progress was achieved in this period, relying on rational and logical knowledge. In fact, this feasible knowledge “made it safe to indulge in rational fantasies” (Stevens 10). Therefore, middle-class readers could safely read those stories in which reason did not work, feeling secure enough to plunge themselves into fear and fantasy. Besides, the Christian Church had a large influence on society at this time as well, as it rejected the groundless credence from its belief system, excluding specifically magic and the belief in idols and evil creatures.

The values that gave shape to the Enlightenment were abstracted from Roman and Greek writings. Hence, literary and artistic productions followed classical rules in order to foster both morality and rationality, avoiding in this way vice and superstition. These classical perspectives produced a past whose standards were contrary to the ideals of the Enlightenment. This past was called ‘gothic’ and it fixed the barbarous and extravagant customs and practices of the Middle Ages. Besides, the Enlightenment contradicted the Christian ideology about the universe and the operation of the social world. Therefore, Gothic works were firstly an attempt to supply the ambivalence between the Enlightenment and the Christian Church, and to explain what the former could not explain (cf. Botting 22). In this way, theories contrary to the ideals of the Enlightenment started to emerge, creating therefore an opposite tendency to the one established by the Enlightenment. These new perspectives arose from the awareness that

overreliance in reason might eliminate our human experience (cf. Stevens 10). The early manifestations of what was first called 'gothic' related to architecture, highlighting Westminster Abbey; and art, remarking the figure of C.D. Friedrich and his *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818). As those artistic practices were expensive, they were only affordable for the aristocracy. Nevertheless, those artistic expressions provided the background for literature, which was within the means of the middle classes, including women.

In this way, many authors began to be fond of this new literary tendency, highlighting the figure of Horace Walpole and his *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), subtitled *A Gothic Story*, whose style showed what the Gothic really meant (cf. Baker 175). Besides, Botting states that "It was Walpole's text that condensed features from old poetry, drama and romance and provided the model for future developments" (48). In the preface of the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole justified his work for its distance from the neoclassical values which predominated during the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, this preface was written in the third person, anonymously, stating that his work was just a translation from an Italian, sixteenth-century manuscript: "The following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529." (Fairclough and Praz 1968, 39). In fact, both the work's plot and its Gothic script gave *The Castle of Otranto* enough authenticity to make the readers believe it was a medieval text (cf. Botting 49). Nevertheless, in the preface of the second edition (1765) Walpole acknowledged that he was the author, writing it in the third person though:

THE favourable manner in which this little piece has been received by the public, calls upon the author to explain the grounds on which he composed it. But, before he opens those motives, it is fit he should ask pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator. (Fairclough and Praz 1968, 43)

The Castle of Otranto is considered to be the earliest truly Gothic novel and the first one to make the readers feel awe and terror through its main character, Manfred; the ghostly events; and its detailed-depicted gloomy settings (cf. Stevens 60). Those settings represent the conventions on what Gothic literature is based: medieval sceneries, the castle, and ruins. Walpole aimed to go back to a world he liked: a world that had been left aside by his contemporary authors; a world of imagination and fantasy.

Following Walpole's main work, Gothic stories acquired their characteristic fear, suspense, supernatural events, and terror which have been consequently attached to the Gothic since the eighteenth century. Those Gothic features evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and novelists did not just play with the supernatural and superstition in their novels, but they found themselves fond of diabolic, macabre, and morbid stories full of nameless horrors.

It is worth remarking the spiritual context of the Gothic, which is a criticism towards the excesses of the clergy, portraying the Inquisition in fearful terms. This religious opposition is clearly depicted in Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) and Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Some of the main authors who followed Walpole's leading tendency were William Beckford with his illustrious *Vathek* (1786), which shows the Gothic interest in exotic settings; Matthew Lewis, who is thought to be the highest transgressor with his work *The Monk*; and Ann Radcliffe, considered to be the master of suspense, proving so in her novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or *The Italian* (1797). These and other characteristics of the Gothic novel have been consensual and have therefore made the Gothic a recognizable genre: impressive landscapes and settings, huge nature, a mysterious atmosphere of suspense, stock characters, supernatural and tragic events, and a spiral narrative method among others.

Gothic Architecture and Settings

Traditionally, Gothic settings have been associated with nightmarish castles, corrupt convents, subterranean spaces, and live burials (cf. Sedgwick 9-10). Botting agrees with Sedgwick in this respect, and affirms that the main locus of Gothic stories is the castle. In his work *Gothic* (1996), Botting states that—in Gothic terms—castles are associated with other ruinous buildings such as graveyards and abbeys, which are generally linked to a barbaric, superstitious and fearsome past (cf. Botting 2-3). These stereotyped castles often hide secret passages, undisclosed rooms and hidden sections, which, in fact, create an atmosphere of mystification and unease, which is distinctive of Gothic fiction. In addition, those architectural elements can express darkness and solitude, which are features of the new morbid sensibility arisen from the Gothic.

We can find examples of these spooky castles in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or in Lewis' transgressive novel *The Monk* (1796). Moreover, authors could not set their stories in their contemporary time because it was the time of the Enlightenment. Therefore, they had to refer to a world in which reason did not work that much. Thus, many novels were set in the Middle Ages.

Concerning landscape, the Gothic is much related to the concept of the sublime. In 1674, Nicholas Boileau (1636-1711), a French poet and critic, translated the Greek text *Peri Hypsous* ('On the Sublime') and incorrectly attributed it to Longinus. From then on, the notion of the sublime acquired a chief position in European aesthetics (cf. Mulvey-Roberts 226) and it prompted the creation of texts dealing with the sublime. Edmund Burke in his work on aesthetics *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) makes a clear distinction between 'the sublime' and 'the beautiful'. He established that "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" (39). Botting explains that the sublime is the consequence of a change in the perspective through which natural sceneries are perceived. He goes on claiming that mountains are the main landscape the sublime focuses on. In fact, Botting affirms that mountainous sceneries evoke pleasure and intense emotions in the reader due to their sense of power and infinity. One could say that the readers are magnetized to those sublime feelings (cf. Botting 3-4). That is to say, according to Burke, the objects which provoke a sublime feeling are vast, immense and magnificent. Moreover, those sublime entities cause in the reader a blend of terror and admiration, matchless to anything else. On the other hand, Burke stated that the effects evoked by the beautiful are almost the opposite of the ones provoked by the sublime, as the beautiful implies subtle, delicate and scant objects. Those are, consequently, the effects that readers perceive from the beautiful. Regarding the impacts caused by the sublime on the readers, it is not surprising that the Gothic is directly related with sublime aesthetics. The infinity and vastness of the sublime is achieved linguistically in Gothic stories by means of thorough descriptions of the landscape, sometimes depicted subjectively.

Dreadful Sense of Suspense

Another important element of Gothic fiction is the atmosphere of mystery and suspense in which stories are usually immersed. This device is frequently created by the ignorance of important aspects such as unknown parentage or inexplicable disappearances. Also, prophecies and omens related to the characters contribute to the development of this mysterious environment which creates in the readers a sense of distress and agony. Undoubtedly, the master of the suspense, in Gothic-literature terms, is Ann Radcliffe. She succeeds in producing mystery and suspense in her works by the inexplicable happenings and sublime sceneries which surround the characters. This characteristic of Ann Radcliffe's novels is evidently represented in *The Italian* (1797). In this novel, the suspense is reached when Schedoni —the villain/hero of the novel— gets anxious when the person who is telling the story does not get to the end of it and ignores Schedoni's pleading. The intrigue felt by the character is at the same time felt by the readers, who are kept in suspense until the ending of the story too.

Supernatural Phenomena

One of the most outstanding features of Gothic literature is the presence of supernatural figures and events. Usually, these paranormal beings are vampires, ghosts, witches or evil creatures which refuse to follow the laws of nature. As Hogle affirms, those paranormal features that Gothic fiction portrays are very much related to the creepy and phantasmatic figures that Sigmund Freud defined as 'uncanny' in his essay *The Uncanny* (1919) (cf. Hogle 6). The uncanny is a philosophical theory developed by Freud, which aims to describe the process through which something once familiar to us suddenly becomes unknown and mysterious. The term 'uncanny', originally named *unheimlich*, initially referred to what is not known and familiar. In literary terms, Tsvetan Todorov (1939) made a distinction between the marvelous and the uncanny. According to this literary critic, readers of Gothic fiction have to face this hesitation: whether our conception of reality can account for the paranormal events or not. In this way, if the events in the story discern from the readers' notion of reality, yet those events are completely normal within the story, then the tale is classified as marvelous. To illustrate this we can recall any fairy tale, where the readers do not pay attention to

the existence of supernatural characters, but to their actions (cf. Heller 43). On the other hand, in the uncanny genre the supernatural events can be accounted for natural and rational explanations. To illustrate this, Heller (1987) refers to the work *Wieland* (1798) by the American writer Charles Brockden Brown. At the end of this novel, the supposed extraordinary events are rationally clarified (cf. Heller 61).

Stock Characters

There is a huge variety of supernatural beings playing a role as characters in Gothic literature, with demonic presences making frequent appearances. Nevertheless, as Marie Mulvey-Roberts claims, “Satanic figures do not appear as such in Gothic novels but rather certain Satanic characteristics are projected onto evil human characters” (43). This means that evil characteristics are portrayed in human beings because those features are considered to be rooted inside human characters. Therefore, we can find some works in which the devil does not appear as a character, but it is represented through a human character. For instance, in Lewis’ *The Monk* the demon is camouflaged as an attractive woman. Besides, these evil beings appear more often than not as villain characters, especially as male villains, as in the case of Maturin’s Schemoli, the main protagonist of *The Fatal Revenge* (1807) (cf. Tracy 7). Thus, it is undeniable that demonic, and particularly Satanic, creatures play an important role as characters in Gothic fiction.

Another important stock character in Gothic fiction is the figure of the wanderer, more specifically the myth of the Wandering Jew. This legend comes from the biblical parable that a Jew displeased Christ with insults while he was walking his way to crucifixion. In another version of this legend, Christ asks for a rest in the Jew’s house but he rejected Christ’s request. In both examples, Christ condemns the Jew to wander until the Second Coming. Consequently, Jews were compelled to travel around Europe, in search of a place where they could live peacefully (cf. Tichelaar 43). The knowledge acquired from his experience is what makes this legendary character so relevant. The general image of the wanderer has been widely used in literature, especially in Romantic and Gothic works. It is clearly represented in Coleridge’s poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1834), Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) or in Maturin’s best-known novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), as the name suggests.

Flat and stereotyped characters are also another distinctive figure of Gothic literature. For example, a hero/villain and a lady in danger are usually found in Gothic novels.

Concerning the figure of the hero/villain, it is worth taking into account that in Gothic literature, readers cannot expect a proper hero or villain. Instead, both types are combined into the same character. To illustrate this, let us consider the instance of Victor Frankenstein. He rejected to create a female creature, who would be the creature's only hope for happiness. This act can be regarded as blameworthy but also as an attempt to save humanity from this creature. Besides, if we move on to *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë, we find the character of Heathcliff. He is mostly described as an arrogant thirsting for revenge and as the devil itself (cf. Punter and Byron 95-96). The reader is told that he is brutal, that he treats people terribly. Nevertheless, his absolute love for Catherine makes the reader feel compassion for him. In both examples, the reader sympathizes unilaterally with those characters; we cannot help hating but at the same time admiring them.

As for the lady in distress, let us recall that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, society was patriarchal. Women were considered helpless, inferior and underprivileged, and that is how they were represented in literature. Particularly in Gothic fiction, female characters appear usually confined inside some building — castles, caves, passages, monasteries—suffering abuses from some man. This is clearly represented in the character of Adeline, from the novel *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) by Ann Radcliffe. Nonetheless, although these damsels may be perceived as weak, incapable or delicate, they are often the main threat to that patriarchal society, as observed in the classics *The Castle of Otranto* with the character of Matilda, or in the character of Antonia in *The Monk*¹. In this way, it is arguable that women in Gothic fiction are incapable of having control over their own lives.

¹ This statement can be exemplified with a brief explanation of the plot of *The Castle of Otranto*, focusing on its protagonist. Matilda is the daughter of the villain Manfred. Matilda is sent to take care of her father even though he does not want her affection. Although Manfred mistreats his family, principally Matilda, she is always loyal and gentle to her father. In fact, she forgives her father for his ill-treatment and this action is what at the end of the novel destabilizes Manfred's patriarchal authority. Therefore, this example illustrates that literary women in Gothic fiction are not always weak and feeble.

Narrative Technique

A narrative is an oral or written sequence of events told from a particular point of view. Gérard Genette (1980) established the differentiation between *who sees?* (the focalizer) and *who tells?* (the narrator), categories which may come in handy for the following discussion of narrative techniques in Gothic novels. Narration has been defined as the voice that narrates, whereas focalization is understood as the point of view from which the story is told. Thus, narrator and focalizer can coincide but it is not necessarily so. In this way, Genette distinguished three types of focalization: zero focalization, in which the narrator is omniscient (the narrator is like a God who knows everything); external focalization, from which readers only get a physical view (there are no explanations nor emotions); and internal focalization, where the narrator only knows what the character knows (everything is seen from the main character's point of view). It is crucial to bear in mind that the focalization might change within the same story (variable focalization). In this type of focalization, readers are presented the story from different viewpoints. The other constituent of the distinction made by Genette is the narrator, which is the 'voice' telling the story. According to Genette, the narrator of the story can be a character (homodiegetic narrator) or can be absent from the story but able to know everything about it (heterodiegetic narrator). Besides, if the homodiegetic narrator is at the same time the protagonist of the story, it is called autodiegetic narrator.

In Gothic novels, narration is usually characterized by its complex and tangled structure. Thus, authors usually employ multiple narratives in their works. In this type of narrative, the viewpoint of the narration changes so that the story is seen from more than one perspective, i.e. there is variable focalization. By using this device, the atmosphere of mystery and intrigue is enlarged as readers have to deal with different version of the same story. Besides, plots are often organized in a spiral manner. That is to say, there are plots within plots in the same story. This spiral narrative method is an emphatic device used to make the readers apprehend the work from as many angles as possible. To achieve this, Gothic plots are usually presented with diverse methods. Some instances of these methods are letters, manuscripts, revealed secrets or clandestine codes. The overall effect in Gothic fiction is that the narrative line becomes fragmented, which provokes a sense of anxiety and anguish in the readers.

The narrative technique is quite striking in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. In the main narration of the former novel, there is a homodiegetic narrator—Walton—who tells the story in an epistolary manner. Within this narration, we find a story told by Victor Frankenstein, which at the same time has the creature's own narration embedded. Therefore, we have three homodiegetic narrators within the same work—two of them being at the same time autodiegetic narrators, namely Frankenstein and the creature—. On the other hand, the narrative method of *Wuthering Heights* differs from the one of *Frankenstein*, it being also quite complex, though. In Emily Brontë's novel, there are two main homodiegetic narrators. The story begins with the narration of Lockwood, which contains Nelly's voice. Although the latter narrator is one of the characters, she describes the thoughts and feelings of the other protagonists. According to Paz Kindelán in her introduction to her Spanish version of *Wuthering Heights* (1989), what makes this narrative technique so impressive is the interlacement between past and present (88).

Terror vs. Horror

In the early stages of Gothic literature, a distinction was drawn between horror and terror. This division was first set out by Ann Radcliffe in her essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826), which was published posthumously. In an attempt to develop Burke's theory of the sublime, Radcliffe claimed that terror and horror were two opposite Gothic strategies (cf. Botting 74). Indeed, "[Radcliffe] knows, as Burke has asserted, that obscurity is a strong ingredient in the sublime; but she knew the sharp distinction between Terror and Horror, which was unknown to Burke" (Varma 103). This distinction has to do with the emotional response of the readers. Accordingly, horror is seen as physical or material fear. One feels horror as a reaction to seeing mutilated corpses or at the thought of cannibalism, for example. Horror is felt mainly when reading the novels of M. G. Lewis, particularly *The Monk*. On the other hand, terror has been widely regarded as a psychological feeling. Terror is also quite fearsome, but it is not portrayed in such brutal manner as Horror. Terror has been usually defined as the feeling of dread and anxiety that precedes a horrific event. As DevendraVarma stated in his work *The Gothic Flame* (1966), it is undeniable that Radcliffe is the master of this literary device, since the supernatural events she describes in her novels, which are

rationaly explained at the end of the story, create an extraordinary atmosphere of mystery and suspense (cf. Varma 91). Indeed, Radcliffe's terror is linked to the supernatural events of her novels in the sense that readers reach their highest point of terror just before the paranormal incident is reasonably explained. Therefore, this contrast between both Mrs. Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis exemplifies the two main streams of Gothic literature: the former standing for terror and the latter comprising horror (cf. Varma 129).

Irish Gothic: Origins and Overview

The origin of the Irish novel is attributed to the Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth with her work *Castle Rackrent* (1800). The Irish Novel has been widely regarded as unconventional due to the lack of stability of Irish society, as opposed to that represented in the novels of some English novelists such as Jane Austen. The reason for this might be that Irish society has not been quite solid or stable. Indeed, instability also accounts for the late appearance of the novel in Ireland. In England, the novel appeared as a consequence of the rise of the middle classes. However, as in Ireland there was not a middle-class as such until World War II, it is not surprising that Irish novels acquired different aspects from the English and American novels (Cahalan xxiii).

From the beginning, Irish works acquired certain features that made the Irish novel to be distinctive from any other kind of novel. Some of these distinguishing features are its special use of language, an exceptional setting, or the significant influence of the oral tradition. In addition to these, it is worth remarking the tangled stories within the plots and the scarce use of heterodiegetic narrators in Irish narratives (cf. Cahalan xxii). Apart from these features, Irish novels have also developed their particular subgenres, namely the Big House novel or the 'peasant novel.' Nevertheless, Irish narratives have also been associated to other subgenres, such as the historical novel, the novel of formation or *bildungsroman*, the fantasy or fabulist novel, and the Gothic novel (cf. Cahalan xxiii), the latter being the object of interest of this B.A. Thesis. Although Irish Gothic fiction has been widely considered to be almost entirely novelistic, Irish Gothic works began to be published in magazines and periodicals. Examples of these early publications are *Confessions of a Reformed Ribbonman* (1830) by William Carleton and the best-known stories of Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-73) (cf. Foster 88).

It has been widely acknowledged that the Irish Gothic tradition began with Charles Robert Maturin. Nevertheless, some of the features that constitute Irish Gothic fiction are already present in Jonathan Swift's pamphlet *A Modest Proposal* (1729). In this work, Swift satirizes the unbalanced economic situation between the upper and the lower classes in Ireland. Besides, Swift aims to mock the British attitude towards the

Irish. The narrator's solution to the poverty of the Irish lower classes is Gothic: selling their children as food to the upper classes. This disturbing suggestion was a satirical response to the barbaric and cruel colonial system imposed on Irish citizens (cf. Powell 128). Therefore, the Irish inferiority complex and fear of British society, which is one of the prominent features of Irish Gothic fiction, are portrayed in Swift's work in a satirical manner.

Although Jonathan Swift's essay boasts some of the attributes that will later be part of the Irish Gothic fiction, John Wilson Foster (2006) has acknowledged that the first glimpses of the Gothic novel can be discerned in works written between the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth (81). In that period, the main Irish Gothic novelists were Regina Maria Roche, famous for her work *The Children of the Abbey* (1796); Sydney Owenson, best known for *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806); and Charles Robert Maturin, author of the representative novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). The early Irish Gothic novels —those which date before 1798— are quite similar to British or North American Gothic. However, after 1798 Irish Gothic became particularly horrific and spooky. This is not surprising, taking into account that this date corresponds to the time when the Irish Rebellion took place. The Irish Rebellion was an uprising whose main principles were much influenced by the American and French revolutions of 1775 and 1789 respectively. What the members of this revolution were vindicating, first in Belfast and then in Dublin, was a parliamentary reform that would promote male suffrage, Catholic emancipation, and the eradication of the British rule in Irish territories. Irish Gothic fiction was much influenced by this political movement, and some of the features of the Irish Gothic find their origin in the Irish Rebellion of 1798.

Main Traits of Irish Gothic Fiction

The arrival of the Enlightenment aggravated the traditional confrontation between the Celtic culture (Irish, Welsh and Scottish) and the English culture. In the eighteenth century, Ireland was considered to be inhabited by irrational and primitive individuals as opposed to England, seen as the land of progress and rationality (cf. Killeen 3). In this way, just as the appropriate settings of the early eighteenth-century Gothic literature

were medieval times and Mediterranean locations, Celtic Gothic had a preference for the terrors inspired by the landscapes of Ireland, Scotland and Wales (cf. Foster 80). In what follows, I will discuss some of the traits that can be said to distinguish Irish Gothic fiction from any other subtype.

1

Irish Gothic fiction is not a homogeneous genre; on the contrary, it is composed of different modes of the same genre. If we take setting as a criterion, there are some works written by Irish authors who have set those stories entirely or partially in Ireland, such as Michael Benim's *Crohoore of the Bill-hook* (1825) and J.H. Riddell's *The Nun's Curse* (1888). Moreover, some Irish writers of Gothic fiction do not set their novels wholly in Ireland, but rather they include some references to this land in their stories. Examples of this variety of Irish Gothic can be found in Robert Maturin's works, for example in *Fatal Revenge* (1807). There are also some stories written by English authors who set their works in Ireland, or whose characters are Irish. This feature of Irish Gothic is evident in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) (cf. Foster 85).

2

The gender of the main character can be also used as a classifying criterion. The Gothic genre can be divided into two categories: 'female' or 'male' Gothic. Although this distinction is also present in the canonical Gothic, Walsh affirms that it is especially important to take into account the gender of the protagonist when studying Irish Gothic fiction (cf. Walsh 113). Works belonging to the so-called female Gothic are usually those that have a woman in distress as the main character. This female protagonist is frequently depicted as a victim who suffers physical, sexual or psychological abuse at the hands of a male character, who is trying to kill or seduce her. Female Gothic is effective when representing the patriarchal society in which women have been trapped. If a Gothic work is said to be 'female', it does not mean that the author is a woman. Rather, a work belongs to the female Gothic type when it shows the disfavored situation of women by means of a terrorized female character.

The distinction between female or male Gothic does not exclusively apply to Irish Gothic, but it has a special connection with the Irish Gothic. In the Irish literary

tradition, female Gothic may hide the oppression and entrapment of the Irish society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a consequence of the British supremacy. *The Children of the Abbey* (1796) by Regina Maria Roche or *Uncle Silas* (1864) by Sheridan Le Fanu are examples of this Irish female Gothic. On the other hand, ‘male’ Gothic works are regarded as those stories in which characters make a Faustian pact in exchange for immortality, knowledge or other interests. Besides, in this Gothic category the *doppelgänger* motif appears. The duality of the main character’s personality is shown in this device. The readers are introduced first to the superficial personality of the protagonist and later to his inner side. One of the best examples that follows this line is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), by Oscar Wilde. In this novel, the main character Dorian Gray makes an unconscious pact with the devil in exchange for eternal beauty and youth when he claimed: “If it was I who were to be always young, and the picture that were to grow old! For this [...] there is nothing in the whole world I would not give!” (Wilde 28). Having his soul sold to the devil, Dorian Gray commits perverse actions, which prevent him from feeling happiness again. This wicked side of Dorian Gray contrasts with his initial characterization as a kind and decent man.

3

The third aspect that differentiates Irish Gothic from other type of Gothic literature is its particular view of Catholicism. Bríana Walsh (2011) states that one of the main characteristics of Irish Gothic is the representation of the fear that Irish Protestants felt towards the supremacy of English Catholicism. Walsh affirms that this is clearly depicted in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, but the feature is also perceived in other novels through a negative description of Catholicism (27). This negative view of Catholicism can be understood as a way of lessening the inferiority complex that Protestants felt with respect to Catholics. Paradoxically, some Irish writers of Gothic fiction feel sympathy for Catholicism, and this is what has been called ‘Catholophilia’. This fact is relevant for Irish Gothic because, as Walsh has asserted, “Catholophilia is a distinct characteristic in Irish Gothic fiction that is not found in English Gothic” (29). This Catholophilia is clearly depicted in *The Children of the Abbey* (1796) by Regina Maria Roche and in *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) by Sydney Owenson. Therefore, in Irish

Gothic fiction there is a dichotomy between fear and passion for Catholicism, which varies depending on the author.

4

Another distinctive characteristic of Irish Gothic literature is its relevant oral tradition. Celtic myths differ a lot from the traditional fairy tale. In Celtic mythology, characters were usually ghostly creatures, such as banshees, vampires, *púcaí* (hobgoblins) and other demonized beings. Besides, happy endings were not very usual in this kind of stories. The writers of Irish Gothic fiction in the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries took those Celtic myths as a reference for their works. In fact, as Foster has affirmed, “The narrative structure of the gothic novel [...] is [...] close to that of the folk story [...] and its characterization is generally as formulaic” (86). Indeed, those dark legends of the Celtic tradition greatly influenced the narratives of significant Irish Gothic authors such as Bram Stoker or Elizabeth Bowen.

5

With respect to those ghostly creatures, Irish Gothic literature is dissimilar to the conventional (British) Gothic fiction in the sense that monstrous characters are not habitually found in it. Monsters as such are usually identified with characters like Frankenstein’s creature from Mary Shelley’s eponymous novel, or Edward Hyde from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Nevertheless, that kind of monster is not present in the majority of the Irish novels belonging to the Gothic tradition. In this case, those supernatural characters are more often than not very similar in appearance to human beings, but differing from them in their behavior. To exemplify this, let’s refer to some Irish Gothic novels such as *Carmilla* (1872) by J. Sheridan Le Fanu, or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde. In both novels, the protagonists have paranormal aspects but they are not portrayed as monstrous. Instead, both beings are physically quite similar to a human being, as depicted in the works. Yet, their actions and conduct are what differentiate them from humans. *Carmilla* is a beautiful and, at first sight, delicate lady who turns out to be a sinister vampire. Similarly, by the end of the story the young man Dorian Gray, who at the beginning of the story was just a gentile man, had become a debauched character. In fact, broadly

speaking we could state that the supernatural characters in Irish Gothic fiction are frequently stunningly attractive. This attraction does not necessarily have to be physical, as these characters can be mentally or spiritually attractive.

6

Another distinguishing feature of Irish Gothic fiction is the presence of particular supernatural events, and especially the belief that there is life after death. This superstition is symbolized in literature as the relationship between the living and the deceased, as the representation of memories of the dead, or as the figure of death itself. The theme of death became recurrent in Irish Gothic works as a consequence of the Irish Rebellion of 1798. According to Foster, the events of 1798 made people hope that the lives of those who perished in the revolution would “live on as presences for their surviving friends” (87). Thereby, many authors of Irish Gothic works began to show a great interest in the image of death—a device that has been called ‘the memory of the dead’. They produced works in which the readers had to face the figure of death directly. It is especially relevant to highlight that in Irish Gothic novels, as Todorov asserted, the supernatural events represent “a real threat to the characters” (qtd. in Walsh 34). In this way, apart from having a creepy and eerie atmosphere, the all-pervasive and gloomy image of death is added to Irish Gothic fiction.

Some of the authors who found themselves delighted with this device were Bram Stoker, as represented in his *The Lady of the Shroud* (1909), and Oscar Wilde, appreciated in his best-known Gothic novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (incidentally, Oscar Wilde was Charles Maturin’s great-nephew). In addition, Le Fanu’s fiction offers a view of the connection between the living and the dead, especially in his famous *Uncle Silas* (1864). In this novel, the relationship between the world of life and death is represented through the characters. According to Powell, the fact that Uncle Silas occupied the place of Austin Ruthyn (Maud Ruthyn’s father) after his death, and then Silas took the role of his deceased brother, is what “connects the worlds of the living and the dead” (130).

Finally, it could be asserted that one of the motifs of Irish Gothic literature is the presence of vampires as protagonists of the stories. This theme has much to do with the link between life and death, particularly in Le Fanu's short story *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker's celebrated novel *Dracula* (1897). Vampires represent the world of death, while human beings stand for the world of life. In the former work, death becomes a way of living since the characters of Laura (the main narrator) and Carmilla (the seductive vampire) are closely (sexually) related. Therefore, the fact that Carmilla and Laura have such an intimate relationship might symbolize the connection between life and death which characterizes Irish Gothic fiction. On the other hand, Bram Stoker embodies the fusion between life and death by means of blood sucking and sexuality. In *Dracula*, human characters feel sexually attracted to vampires, and the fact that those fantastic characters suck the blood of humans may stand for the link between the living and the deceased. In this way, the disturbing and gloomy atmosphere in Irish Gothic literature is mainly achieved by connecting life and death in a sexual and emotional way.

Canonical and Irish Gothic Features in *Melmoth the Wanderer*

The aim of this Thesis is to study the elements belonging to the canonical Gothic fiction and those belonging to the Irish Gothic in the novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Robert Maturin. I will run through the Gothic traits in the novel and classify them as canonical or peculiar to Irish Gothic works on the basis of what I have said in the previous chapters.

But before going in depth into this empirical analysis of the presence of traits from the two types of Gothic fiction in the one novel, it may be worth pointing out some relevant aspects of the life of this little-known figure.

Charles Robert Maturin was born in Dublin in 1782 and died in 1824 in the same city. He was educated at Trinity College and became a curate in Loughrea and Dublin. Besides, as his income was not enough to pay expenses, Maturin worked as a teacher, instructing some scholars for college. Hereinafter, he took up his literary career, which allowed him to give up his other professional activities (cf. Grant vii). In 1807, his first novel *Fatal Revenge* was published under the pseudonym of Dennis Jasper Murphy. Maturin used this nickname in order to protect his career as a clergyman (cf. Sage vi). Some other works came after his *Fatal Revenge*, but it was in 1816 when Maturin obtained recognition and success. The publication of his tragedy *Bertram* (1816), performed by the popular actor Edmund Kean at Drury Lane in London, caught the attention of the prestigious writer Sir Walter Scott. In fact, Walter Scott became the main financial and professional support of Charles Maturin, producing and arranging some of his works in London and Edinburgh (cf. Hughes et al 428). With the triumph of his early tragedy, Maturin wrote *Manuel* (1817) and *Fredolfo* (1819) very much in the same line. Nevertheless, these works turned out to be failures, and Maturin had to leave aside his preference for drama in favour of novels. *Melmoth the Wanderer* was published in the last years of his life, when the majority of his novels were rejected. In this way, Maturin died in poverty in 1824.

It happened that Maturin was Oscar Wilde's great uncle. Charles Maturin married Henrietta Kingsbury, sister of Sarah Kingsbury. This latter woman had a daughter called Jane Wilde, who was the mother of Oscar Wilde. In fact, due to the challenging judicial process Oscar Wilde had to undergo, he adopted the pen name 'Sebastian Melmoth' in honor of Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*.

Nevertheless, Wilde was not the only one to be fascinated by *Melmoth*, since it has been identified by Agustín Izquierdo as the peak of the Gothic representation of existence (qtd. in Francisco Torres Oliver's "Introducción" to *Melmoth el Errabundo* 2005, 9). Although Charles Maturin's novels never received proper recognition *pre mortem*, Victor Sage has identified Maturin as "one of the foremost writers of the Gothic school" (in his introduction to *Melmoth the Wanderer* 2011, vi). As a Gothic author, Maturin followed the model established by 'Monk' Lewis and Ann Radcliffe, aiming to exceed their extravagance with violent, grotesque, comic and sublime effects arising simultaneously in his work (cf. Sage xi).

Melmoth the Wanderer is the story of Melmoth, a young man who, after making a pact with the devil, lengthens his life much more than expected in an ordinary human being. Nevertheless, this does not bring happiness nor pleasure to the protagonist, but rather it drags him to the most obscure and profound despair. Melmoth could only get rid of this curse when another person offers him/herself to assume the torment. In this way, the plot of the novel revolves around Melmoth's quest for a substitute, leading the protagonist towards the most inhospitable places. Thus, this novel has been widely regarded as an infernal vision of human destiny. Due to the presence of the Fiend, the spooky descriptions, terrible tortures, irrational events, nightmarish characters and gloomy settings, I chose this work to do an empirical comparison between the canonical and Irish Gothic aspects found in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*.

Canonical Gothic Traits in *Melmoth the Wanderer*

In this section, the canonical aspects of Gothic fiction found in the novel at issue will be discussed.

1 Melmoth as a Stock Character

One of the distinctive aspects of Gothic literature is the use of stock characters. In the case of Maturin's novel, in particular, the myth of the Wandering Jew deserves special attention. This figure is represented in literature by means of a misunderstood or rejected character that roams from place to place, acquiring knowledge or experiences from each site. *Melmoth the Wanderer* embodies this image perfectly. As Cahalan explicitly states "As with Joyce and Beckett, the theme of exile is of central interest to Maturin" (33). In this work, the main character Melmoth, after making a deal with the Fiend, is condemned to wander ad infinitum until he finds someone to exchange his demoniac burden with. For this reason, the novel does not take place in a single place, but rather the settings are composed of numerous locations. Although *Melmoth* begins and ends in the same place (Ireland), the in-between narratives occur in diverse spots, such as London or Spain. This wanderer, Melmoth, has always the same physical appearance since he had been granted with extra years of life. Furthermore, Melmoth combines another typical feature of Gothic works, and it is that, being a personification of the Devil, he has human appearance. This is ratified by John Stott (1987) who asserts, "the wanderer is a man [...] but he is obviously no ordinary man" (45). That is to say, Melmoth is a human being who has acquired satanic powers. Therefore, it can be assumed that the character of Melmoth corresponds to the canonical Gothic figure, in the sense that he is an allegory of the Wandering Jew and he is a supernatural being with a human appearance.

2 Gothic Motifs

As a canonical Gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* encompasses the typical motifs of Gothic fiction. In this way, readers experiment fear and suspense since the opening passage of the work. The first flash of fright takes place in the scene in which John Melmoth's uncle dies, and John sees the sinister figure of an unknown man standing at the door of the room of the deceased. This feeling of fear is increased when the reader is told that this man resembles the picture of Melmoth's ancestor, who is told to be unaccountably still alive: "John saw the door open, and a figure appear at it, who looked

round the room, and then [...] retired, but not before John had discovered in his face the living original of the portrait” (Maturin 1972, 20).

Regarding the canonical settings and architecture of Gothic fiction, *Melmoth the Wanderer* does not meet with those aspects accurately. It is true that nightmarish locations such as tyrannized convents or subterranean passages appear in the novel, but other more relevant settings of the canonical Gothic such as castles, ruinous buildings or graveyards are not present in this work. Besides, canonical Gothic works are usually set in the Middle Ages, but *Melmoth* is not. More to the point, sublime descriptions of the landscape are included but they are not as outstanding as in the case of some other canonical novels, such as in *Wuthering Heights*, for instance.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* includes some of the so-called canonical Gothic novels’ motifs, the feeling of fear and suspense being the most relevant ones. However, other relevant aspects of canonical Gothic fiction, such as its typical settings and sublime descriptions, are not present in a remarkable manner.

3 Terror and Horror

According to the master of suspense, Ann Radcliffe, Gothic fiction comprises two contrary strategies, namely Terror and Horror. In this way, Gothic works can be classified into two categories according to whether readers feel terror or horror. This categorization results from the emotional response of the reader. Thereby, Terror corresponds to a psychological fear, such as that provoked by suspense. On the other hand, Horror is associated with a physical fear, like that felt when seeing dead bodies, for instance.

Devendra Varma identified Charles Maturin as a writer of Horror Gothic, especially his best-known novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (cf. Varma 98). This statement is supported by the definition that Fred Botting provided in his work *Gothic* (1996): “[Horror] freezes human faculties, rendering the mind passive and immobilizing the body” (75). This explanation corresponds to the actions taking place in Maturin’s work since the characters confront violent events and the established norms of human life are shattered with awful consequences.

One feels horror reading *Melmoth* chiefly in the passage called “Tale of the Spaniard”, especially at the end. The homodiegetic narrator of this tale, Alonzo Monçada, describes in an explicit manner the sufferings and tortures he underwent in the Catholic convent where he was imprisoned. Since Alonzo refused to be a monk, he was repressed in that convent and forced to endure humiliation and torments. One of the most horrific passages of this tale occurred when The Superior enclosed Alonzo in a small, dark, cold, wet dungeon. The Horror of this scene is portrayed in the form of the awful and hopeless words of Alonzo:

I imagined this terrible vault had never been unclosed before; that I was to be the first victim inhumed within it; [...] I should never quit it alive. As these thoughts occurred, in unutterable agony I cried aloud, [...] but my cries were drowned in the jarring of the heavy door. (Maturin 1972, 144)

Apart from the all-pervasive darkness that filled the decaying dungeon, Alonzo also had to face the nasty reptiles that inhabited the vault and which tried to eat the only piece of bread Alonzo was provided as nourishment:

‘In Christian mercy leave me a light, if it be to defend myself against the reptiles that must swarm here.’ And already I saw this was true, for some extraordinary size [...] came crawling down the walls. (Maturin 1972, 144)

Therefore, the feeling of horror in this passage is achieved by the image of a claustrophobic vault which has not been opened in years; and by the blindness of the character due to the lack of light, which prevents him from being able to defend from the hideous animals:

I would rather never sleep again, than awake so horribly. (Maturin 1972, 144)

I was to behold the light no more; nor to watch those divisions of time, which, by measuring our portions of suffering, appear to diminish them. (Maturin 1972, 144)

The reptiles [...] gave me opportunity to for a kind of constant, miserable, ridiculous hostility [...]. I struck at them; I tried to terrify them by my voice, to arm myself against them by the help of my mat; but above all, my anxiety was ceaseless to defend my bread from their loathsome incursions, and my pitcher of water from their dropping into it. (Maturin 1972, 146)

In the “Tale of the Spaniard”, there is also another quite horrific passage. It happened that Alonzo Monçada designed a plan to escape from the convent, helped by his brother Juan. The plan consisted on escaping through a long and labyrinthine passage accompanied by another monk, who also wanted to flee from the convent. In a moment of physical and psychological weakness, the monk told Alonzo a nightmarish story about two monks who were really good friends. Such was the friendship between the two monks that the other preachers began to suspect. In this way, it was discovered that these two monks were a loving couple, the woman being camouflaged as a monk. As a punishment, they were imprisoned in a small, dark cell, without food or water. The monk telling this story to Alonzo was the one in charge of watching over the two lovers: “Then the agony of hunger increased, they shrunk from the door, and groveled apart from each other. *Apart!* —how I watched that” (Maturin 1972, 212). This monk stood in front of the cell’s door, listening to their desperate and harrowing screams, and more specifically, to the anguished cries of the woman caused by the attempts of her lover to eat her:

The third night [...] the disunion of every tie of the heart, of passion, of nature, had commenced [...]. It was on the fourth night that I heard the shriek of the wretched female, —her lover, in the agony of hunger, had fastened his teeth in her shoulder; —that bosom on which he had so often luxuriated, became a meal to him now. (Maturin 1972, 212-213)

However, it is not only the image of cannibalism between the couple what provokes the sense of horror, but also the fact that the dead woman was indeed the monk’s sister:

On the sixth day [...] they were no more [...]. As we removed them [the bodies] into the light, the long hair of the female, [...] recalled a likeness I thought I could remember. I looked closer, she was my own sister, —my only one,—and I had heard her voice grow fainter and fainter. I had heard [...] it ceased. (Maturin 1972, 213-214)

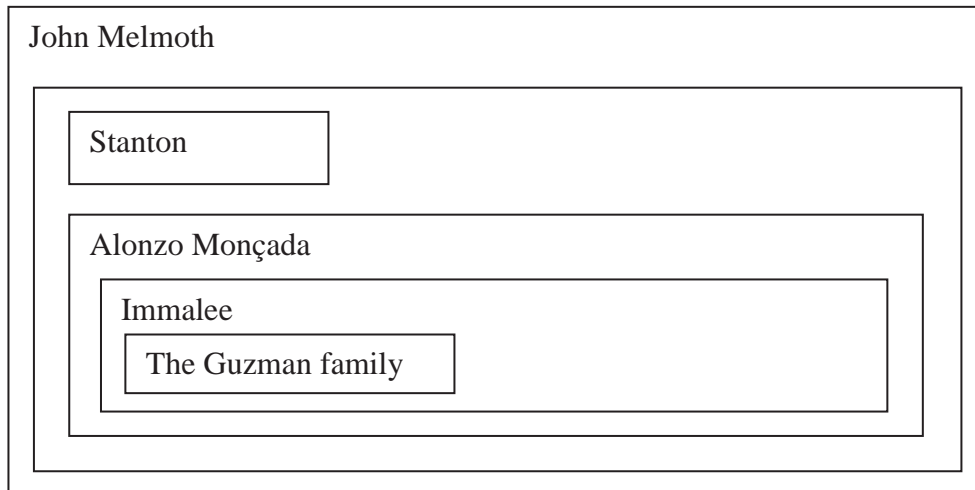
The feeling of horror comes on the scene more clearly in this passage than in the previous one. It is undeniable that the view of having allowed your own and only sister die, imprisoned in a nightmarish cell, while her lover attempted to eat her, causes in both the characters and the readers a sense of horror. In the novel, this effect is accomplished by the depictions of the lovers’ screams of agony and the descriptions of the progressive estrangement between them, and the delight that the guardian monk experienced with this: “They were rapidly becoming objects of hostility to each other;

—oh what a feast to me!. The second night they raved and groaned [...] [and] the man often accused the female as the cause of all his sufferings”; “All the horrible and loathsome excruciations of famine had been undergone” (Maturin 1972, 212).

Irish Gothic Traits in *Melmoth the Wanderer*

1 Tangled Narrative Structure

Some literary critics, such as David Punter, have identified Gothic fiction as a chaotic genre, full of excess and exaggeration, which tends to exceed cultural barriers (cf. Punter and Byron 7). In this way, it is logical that the narrative technique of Gothic fiction does not follow the conventional narrative model. Instead, we find different stories told under dissimilar viewpoints. As the canonical Gothic shaped the base of Gothic fiction, it is not surprising to find that its variants, such as the Irish one, acquired some of its features. For this reason, although the convoluted narrative technique has been previously included in this B.A. Thesis in the canonical category, this trait has also become distinctive of the Irish Gothic. Indeed, James Cahalan has affirmed that works composed of different stories but joined by a central theme are properly from the Irish literary tradition (cf. 33). This is certainly proven in the examples of some Irish works like *Castle Rackrent* (1800) by Maria Edgeworth and *Ulysses* (1922) by James Joyce. With respect to Irish Gothic literature, convoluted stories have become an essential feature for this genre. *Melmoth the Wanderer*’s narrative technique corresponds to that established as the distinguishing one of Irish works, and more specifically of Irish Gothic works. To clarify the convoluted narrative structure of this work, I have designed a frame including all the narratives within the novel in the following page:



Melmoth begins and ends in Ireland owing to the narrative device of embedding stories within stories, but in between the story, the characters travel around different places. In a first narrative level, the novel begins with the story of John Melmoth, a young student who goes to his dying uncle's house, having a heterodiegetic narrator telling this chronicle: "In the autumn of 1816, John Melmoth [...] quitted [Trinity College] to attend a dying uncle on whom his hopes for independence chiefly rested" (Maturin 1972, 7).

There, John is told the fantastic story of his mysterious ancestor, Melmoth, who is said to be alive for more than a century. This chronicle —the second narrative level we come across— is told in the form of a manuscript written by an Englishman called Stanton, told in the third person through a heterodiegetic narrator: "The manuscript was discoloured, obliterated, and mutilated [...]. The writer [...] was an Englishman of the name of Stanton [...]. Stanton, about the year 1676, was in Spain" (Maturin 1972, 28). Next to the house of Melmoth's uncle, a Spanish ship strands in the shore. There was only one survivor, the Spaniard Alonzo Monçada, who begins to tell his own story, a further narrative level we can add to this review: "but the Spaniard [...] commenced his narrative [...]. 'I am, Senhor, [...] a native of Spain, but you are yet to learn I am a descendant of one of its noblest houses.'" (Maturin 1972, 73).

Therefore, in only five chapters the readers are already presented three different stories (the one of John Melmoth, Stanton and Alonzo Monçada), each one embedded within the previous tale. To be more precise, the 'Tale of the Spaniard' does not only include the story of Alonzo Monçada and his family, but also other diverse tales. One of

the most relevant chronicles told in this tale is that of the monk who accompanies Alonzo Monçada in his escape from the convent: “‘I remember’, said he, ‘an extraordinary circumstance connected with this vault [...]. I was desired to attach myself to a young monk of distinguished family’” (Maturin 1972, 204).

The matryoshka-like narrative structure does not end with this record, but there are also at least two additional stories: the one of Immalee and that of the starving family of Guzman. Immalee’s story is told in the form of a manuscript written by Alonzo and read by the character of Adonijah. This new story is told in the third person by a heterodiegetic narrator:

‘Tell him thy story thyself [...]’ And supporting the skeleton with one hand, he pointed with the other [...] to the manuscript that lay before me [...]. Involuntarily, I fixed my eye on the manuscript I was to copy, and never withdrew till I had finished its extraordinary contents. (Maturin 1972, 272)

Following the same model of stories-within-stories, the tale of the Guzman family is immersed within the one just recorded here. In this case, the story is narrated orally by the character named as ‘the stranger’ to the character of Don Francisco, who listens carefully in that stormy night to the tale that the stranger is about to relate.

‘I am willing to pass away some hours of this unpleasant night in relating to you some circumstances relating to the wanderer [...]’ Don Francisco assented to this proposal as much from curiosity. (Maturin 1972, 397)

One of the most crucial stories comprised in this novel is in the second narrative level listed above: that of John Melmoth’s ancestor, Melmoth. This character, after making a deal with the Fiend, is immersed in the quest for the salvation of his soul. In fact, the character of Melmoth is the central theme that connects the other stories. So, what at the beginning seemed to be an ordinary diabolical story, by the middle of the work has turned into an intricate net of stories, kept together by means of a central character. In this way, it can be asserted that *Melmoth the Wanderer*’s narrative method of tangled stories parallels that of the Irish Gothic, since this technique is expressly distinctive of Irish Gothic, though it is also found in some non-Irish Gothic works. This is supported by Julia Wright (2010) who affirms that Melmoth’s narrative method is claustrophobic and that “the Chinese-doll structure of narratives encapsulated within narratives is

disoriented enough, but the real suffocating pressure is brought to bear by the [...] nature of the stories” (Wright 355).

2 Catholophobia

As has been previously stated, one of the main and distinguishing characteristics of Irish Gothic literature is its representation of the fear and complex of inferiority of Irish Protestants towards English Catholicism. This ‘Catholophobia’ is evidently reflected in *Melmoth the Wanderer* by means of negative portrayals of Catholic convents, monks, and mainly by the unfavorable actions of the Inquisition. According to Bríana Walsh, Maturin’s *Melmoth* displays the Spanish Inquisition as “irrational, repressive, violent and cruel” (28). These negative descriptions of Catholic institutions may be a way of criticizing Catholic hypocrisy.

The character that suffers the most the horrible excruciations of the Catholic Inquisition is Alonzo Monçada, who is forced to reside in a convent in Madrid in order to become a monk against his will. Some of those threats and bad treatments can be spotted in the following words pronounced by the convent’s Superior: “Tremble, then, lest you should not have life spared to see the fulfillment of your impious purposes” (Maturin 1972, 141). However, the torments caused by the Spanish Inquisition become particularly evident in the words of its victims, as Alonzo Monçada narrates:

And it was true, —I was a prisoner in the Inquisition [...]. The punishment of a monk who had dared to escape from his convent, might be dreadful enough, —immurement, or death perhaps. (Maturin 1972, 226)

The fact that Maturin includes the Spanish Inquisition in his work is not accidental, since it was the most radical Catholic institution against heretics in Europe. Besides, the Inquisition lasted for almost four centuries, during which the tortures and persecutions did not cease. As has been formerly explained, Irish Protestants were afraid of the Catholic rule they had been subject to. Douglas Grant (1998) has asserted that Maturin chose Spain as the setting for his novel owing to the nightmarish and terrifying view that this country provoked in the Irish at the time (cf. Grant xiii).

Nevertheless, although *Melmoth the Wanderer* is a recognized criticism against Catholicism and especially against the Spanish Inquisition, this work has a close

connection to the Bible. The first hint is the presence of the Devil as a tempting figure, with whom one should never make a deal, which corresponds to the view established in the Bible. As a matter of fact, the religious value of rejecting the offers of the Devil is manifested in the preface of the novel: “Is there one of us who would [...] accept all that man could bestow, or earth afford, to resign the hope of his salvation? —No, there is [...] not such a fool on earth” (Maturin 1972, 5). In addition, there is a parallelism between Adam and Melmoth, on the one hand, and Eve and Immalee, on the other. David Punter has asserted that, although Melmoth is the Fiend himself, he is a kind of Adam too (cf. Punter 2012, 141). This character resists against the temptation of power and love —since he rejects the love of Immalee. However, he is at the same time the one trying to persuade someone to exchange his burden. On the other hand, Immalee stands for innocence and purity. She is a naïve character who finds herself deceived by Melmoth, in the same way that Eve was misled by the snake in the Genesis. In this way, it is seen that although *Melmoth the Wanderer* comprises the fear towards Catholicism, which is so characteristic from Irish Gothic fiction, the professional career of Charles Maturin as curate is also reflected in the novel.

3 *Melmoth the Wanderer* as a Male Gothic Novel

Gothic novels are said to be gendered, depending on the kind of plot of the novels. In this way, Gothic works are considered female if they include a woman as victim of the abuses of some wicked man. On the other hand, male Gothic works are those that incorporate the Faustian motif, that is, when the male protagonist has made some sort of deal with the Devil. This leaves no doubt as to the fact that Maturin’s novel belongs to the male Gothic type, since the whole plot revolves around the pact made between Melmoth and the Fiend. Readers get a first hint of the situation when they read about the legend that John Melmoth is told about his ancestor, concerning a man who has unaccountably stayed alive for uncountable years without changing his physical appearance.

‘I am dying of fright. That man [...] is alive still.’ ‘How is that possible, Sir? [...] the date on the picture is 1646.’ [...] [his uncle] exclaimed, ‘You will see him again, he is alive.’ (Maturin 1972, 18)

The ominous legend of Melmoth, the damned character, is told piecemeal throughout the different narratives included in the novel, so that readers end up learning his complete story. Each substory shows Melmoth's attempts at getting rid of his demoniac burden.

Nonetheless, Faustian-like novels are not the only ones that compose male Gothic fiction, since Tyler R. Tichelaar has declared that "Masculine Gothic criticizes social institutions as themselves transgressive" (40). This statement is also in keeping with the novel by Charles Maturin, given that this author criticizes the Spanish Inquisition noticeably. To do this, Maturin introduces the readers to an innocent character, Alonzo Monçada, who unfairly undergoes several tortures carried out by this pitiless institution.

As a result, it is evident that *Melmoth the Wanderer* fits in the categorization of male Gothic fiction doubly. This is corroborated given that the Faustian motif of a human being making a pact with the Devil is the main theme of the novel. Also, the fact that this author used his novel as a way of criticizing the iniquities executed by the Inquisition makes *Melmoth* fit in almost ideally in the masculine Gothic labeling.

4 'The Memory of the Dead'

Irish Gothic writers found themselves fond of the so-called literary device 'the memory of the dead.' Thus, these writers aimed to bring their characters in contact with death in many different manners. One of the most popular ways of representing this mechanism among Irish writers was through the incorporation of vampires as characters. In addition, this device is linked to the idea that there is life after death and/or that life and death are connected. However, as to the novel at issue in this B.A. Thesis, Maturin went for the Faustian theme to illustrate this literary device. The fact that Melmoth had made a deal with the Devil means that this character had to face death, at least indirectly. Melmoth is not dead, but we could say that he is not alive either, since he spends his time looking for another desperate soul with whom he can exchange his hellish burden. Therefore, the connection between life and death is glaringly apparent in this figure.

Although Melmoth is the main character in this novel, he is not the only one who has to encounter death. Many characters die within this story and their deaths are

narrated explicitly, such as the one of Alonzo Monçada's brother: "Juan staggered back from the step of the carriage, —he fell. I sprung out, I fell too —on his body. I was bathed in his blood, —he was no more" (Maturin 1972, 215). In addition, readers are presented with dead characters, who are just present in the novel as memories of other characters. For instance, the monk who helped Alonzo escape from the tyrannized convent discloses Alonzo that he murdered his own father. This corresponds to a large degree with the literary device at issue in this section, given that characters are constantly evoking deceased characters. With this, these defunct characters remain in a way 'alive', increasing the tie between life and death. Besides, from the beginning of the story until virtually the end of it, the figure of death falls within the novel. The work begins with the decease of John Melmoth's uncle and ends with the figure of the wanderer fading away:

On a crag beneath them, something hung as floating to the blast [...]. It was the handkerchief which the Wanderer had worn about his neck the preceding night —that was the last trace of the Wanderer!. (Maturin 1972, 542)

In this way, it can be seen that *Melmoth the Wanderer* follows the Irish Gothic tradition of including death as an essential figure in different manners.

Conclusions

After analyzing the specific traits of the canonical Gothic and of the properly named 'Irish' Gothic, my initial hypothesis that there is not just one kind of Gothic fiction has been ratified. To support my thesis, I examined the particular characteristics of the canonical Gothic texts and then analyzed those of the Irish Gothic tradition. In this way, I realized that each type of Gothic fiction has its own peculiar features, even though the Irish Gothic retains some of the aspects of the canonical Gothic fiction. Indeed, before evaluating the features of each literary practice, I had already classified Maturin's work as an Irish Gothic novel, a hypothesis that found confirmation once I had assessed both types of Gothic fiction. By comparing them to the novel at issue, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, it became evident that the major themes of this work correspond to a large degree with the aspects previously stated as particular of the Irish Gothic tradition. It is true that *Melmoth* holds some of the features characteristic of the canonical Gothic. However, we should not forget that the canonical Gothic constitutes the basis of all its other variants. For this reason, it is not unexpected to find some canonical aspects of the Gothic tradition in this work. However, the fact that Maturin's novel includes a considerable number of Irish Gothic traits places *Melmoth the Wanderer* into the category of Irish Gothic fiction. Thereby, I confirm that my preliminary hypothesis is correct. Nevertheless, I am not alone supporting this statement, since other authors such as James M. Cahalan in his book titled *The Irish Novel* (1988) evaluates Maturin's work as belonging to the category of Irish Gothic: "That *Melmoth* fits into an Irish tradition becomes clear when one considers it in light of other Irish novels" (Cahalan 32).

To support my assertion that *Melmoth the Wanderer* is in fact an Irish Gothic novel, I will sum up the main Irish Gothic traits found in this work. The two aspects that make this novel to fit in the label of Irish Gothic are the convoluted narrative technique employed and the way that Maturin represents Catholicism, revealing the apprehension of the Irish Protestant society towards Catholicism. Although there are other minor traits belonging to the Irish Gothic tradition in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the previously cited features provide Maturin's work with its properly assigned label of 'Irish Gothic novel'.

This paper deals with a literary movement that has not been taken into account as much as other movements, such as the Romanticism or the Modernism. It is in a way understandable, given that Gothic fiction originated as a reaction to the established social norm in a time when going against the rule was not acceptable. To this we must add that rapes, deaths, sexual obscenities, persecutions and other distasteful actions are frequent themes in Gothic novels, which can be another reason why this literary movement has not received the proper recognition. Consequently, the Irish Gothic tradition has not been much investigated and its distinguishing characteristics have not been arranged methodically. For this reason, I consider that my study contributes to this field of research in literature, since it elucidates the origins and key traits of the canonical Gothic and fills in a gap with its layout of the distinctive characteristics of Irish Gothic fiction. Besides, this B.A. Thesis provides a biographical sketch of a quite disregarded author, Charles Robert Maturin, who deserves to be heeded for his undeservedly little-known contributions to Gothic literature, as his masterpiece *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Therefore, my study can be constructive for the fantastic world of Gothic literature, given that it offers a singular analysis of an ignored novel, which perfectly deserves the label of Gothic work.

Certainly, I consider that Gothic literature in general is a 'genre' that is really worth some consideration. First, it is necessary to understand that Gothic works are indeed the way their authors had to escape from the oppressive society they lived in. Therefore, Gothic works are not a way of entertainment, but a kind of emergency exit from authors' fears and anguish. From a more literary point of view, Gothic works are full of impressive descriptions, which have the capacity of taking the reader into the novel's inner world. Besides, Gothic characters stand for the internal passions and fervent emotions of human beings, and the plots are completely diverse. There are Gothic works about a tragic love story, and others dealing with hideous murders. It was the beauty of this genre that caught at first my attention, and then, it was its unpredictable and assorted themes that encouraged me to investigate a little bit more about this topic. In the same way, I recommend giving Gothic literature the proper recognition it deserves at a more academic level.

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